

WHY ESCAPE WINDOWS?

Many fire-related deaths in residential buildings are due to occupants being asleep at the time of a fire. Because of this, the Uniform Building Code (U.B.C.) requires basements in dwelling units and all sleeping rooms below the fourth story to have windows or doors which may be used as an emergency escape.



Since basements often serve as sleeping rooms they must have an escape window, basement occupants deserve the same protection as someone occupying a regular sleeping room.

Fire spreads quickly, and sleeping occupants are often unaware of the fire until the normal exit channels are blocked.

WHAT SIZE IS NEEDED?

The dimensions prescribed in the code for exterior wall openings used in emergency situations are based on extensive testing.

The minimum width is 20 inches, the minimum height is 24 inches, the minimum square foot 5.7 (820.8 square inches) and the maximum sill height from the floor is 44 inches.

WHERE SHOULD THE WINDOWS BE LOCATED?

The required windows for emergency escape or rescue should be located on the exterior of the building so rescue can be more effective. Likewise, occupants may escape from the window to the exterior of the building without having to travel through the building itself. If windows open into an interior court, the court must have an exit passageway which provides access to the public way.



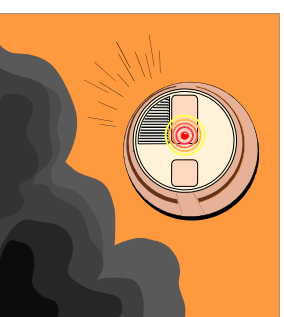
Windows used for emergency escape or rescue must be operable windows. They should be the usual double hung, horizontal sliding or casement windows operated by the turn of a crank. The building official should evaluate special types of windows other than those described based upon the difficulty of operating or removing windows. If the amount of effort to remove the window is comparable to that of three types listed above, the windows might be approved as long as no tools, special knowledge or effort is required.

WHAT IF I HAVE SECURITY DEVICES?

The increasing concern for security, particularly in residential buildings, has created a fairly large demand for security devices such as grilles, bars and steel shutters.

Unless properly designed and constructed, these security devices over bedroom windows can completely defeat the purpose of the emergency escape and rescue window. Therefore, the U.B.C. makes provisions for security devices, provided the release mechanism has been approved and is operable from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge. The code also requires in this case that buildings be equipped with smoke detectors.

The requirement of emergency escape windows assures a person effective escape or rescue in a short period of time. Because fire spreading and blockage of normal exit routes, time cannot be wasted by the occupant trapped by fire trying to open a rescue window. Any impediment to escape or rescue caused by security devices, inadequate window size, difficult operating mechanisms, etc., is a code violation.



U.B.C. Section 1204
Minimum Size Window for 20" Clear Width



- The 24 inch height was based on room needed to admit fire personnel with gear.